

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
4141 N. Third Street –Phoenix, AZ 85012
Thursday - October 13, 2005

M I N U T E S

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 10:02 a.m. by Chairman Ellis.

Members Present

Advisory Commission Members

Webb Ellis, Chairperson
Robert Boyd
Tom Dingwall
Linda Fulkerson
Mary Ellen Piotrowski
Phillip Quochytewa

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Patrick F. Chorpennig, Director
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner
Vanita Parker, Executive Assistant
Lee Borgen, Veterans Benefit Counselor II

Members Absent

Kenneth Yamanouchi
Larry Brown

Guests – Joan Sisco, CEO – Veterans First, Ltd.; Lynn Timmons, Federal Relations and Grants Liaison with the City of Phoenix; and Sarah Hall, Central City Administrator – City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department.

Approval of Minutes - Minutes of the September 17, 2005 meeting were approved as corrected. The June 2005 meeting minutes needed to be corrected to reflect that Commissioner Dingwall was not present.

Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame

The Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame is a program administered by Unified Arizona Veterans (UAV). Mary Ellen, UAV Chair, and Webb Ellis, Lifetime Consultant to the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame, are both actively involved with the program. A press release was distributed regarding the induction ceremony on October 28, 2005. The fifth annual ceremony will honor 17 recipients.

Review of Yuma/Show Low Meetings

The Yuma meeting was held in May on a Thursday at 11:00 a.m. The Show Low meeting was held on a Saturday in September at 10:00 a.m. Commissioner Ellis wanted to review any action items coming from the meetings to ensure the Advisory Commissioners were meeting their obligations.

Yuma Meeting

There were two action items resulting from the Region 4 meeting in Yuma:

1. Parade fees charged to veterans service organizations and
2. A request to assist in establishing a Stand Down event for homeless vets in the area.

One of the attendees wanted the State of Arizona to waive parade fees that were charged. The City of Yuma was actually the government imposing the parade fees for Veterans' Day participants. The issue was resolved by the Yuma Vice-Mayor before the meeting concluded.

Issue #2 – Homeless Stand Down has required quite a bit of coordination by Linda Fulkerson. Commissioner Fulkerson will be traveling to Yuma on November 19th to bring together various factions to be involved in the Stand Down. She will be coordinating with Larry Brown as possible and reported her progress to date. Chairman Ellis, Commissioner Dingwall, and Commissioner Boyd all had suggestions on who to contact to obtain various services for homeless veterans.

Lee Borgen, Veterans Benefit Counselor with the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS), suggested that Ron Buchanan from the VA would be able to open some doors. Art Nottingham, Veterans Benefit Counselor with ADVS, would be in the best position to get a judge there to waive outstanding warrants on homeless vets.

Commissioner Boyd indicated that the Phoenix Stand Down will be held October 28 – 30 and provided copies of a faxed flyer before the meeting concluded. The participating organizations in that Stand Down will be helpful to Commissioner Fulkerson.

Show Low Meeting

Chairman Ellis sent a letter of support to the Phoenix VA Hospital, requesting consideration for a permanent clinic in Globe in lieu of its current mobile clinic.

Commissioner Dingwall indicated that he believes the first step in securing more services from the VA begins by adding access to Veterans Benefits Counselors in that specific area. When veterans are made aware of the benefits due them, they are more likely to request services from the VA.

Chairman Ellis discussed a letter that was provided by the Navajo Veterans' Organization, Inc. The presenter was Cassandra Morgan, Registered Agent. Chairman Ellis requested Gabe Forsberg provide the ADVS Director a copy of the letter.

Action items coming out of the Show Low meeting:

1. There was difficulty in receiving paperwork from the VA after assisting a veteran filing a claim. This will stop being a problem when there are more Veterans Benefits Counselors. Commissioner Ellis will draft a letter and run it by the Arizona Department of Veterans Services before finalizing.
2. Housing on the reservation continues to be an issue. The tribe owns the land on reservations, instead of the individual. Director Chorpenning thought that home loan issues had been resolved.
3. Veterans preference for hiring state employees is established in statute; it specifies that a certain number of points are added to the "score" assigned to the applicant. The current hiring practices do not use a point system and the preference is non-existent. There does not appear to be any need for further action.
4. There was a perception that the Advisory Commission was heavily staffed by officers mentioned during the region meeting. Commissioners Boyd and Fulkerson spoke to the individual who raised the question. Rank plays no role in the Commission's work.
5. Commissioner Piotrowski researched the issue of why some counties waive property tax for veterans service organizations while others must pay. Veterans service organizations are not being treated consistently statewide. Director Chorpenning offered to obtain a copy of the legislation associated with this action and report back to the Commission.

Agency Announcements and Updates

Veterans Task Force

Chairman Ellis suggested Advisory Commission change its December meeting to 12/15/05, to coincide with the Veterans Task Force meeting. The meeting is held at the Governor's 2nd Floor Conference Room at 1700 W. Washington at 1:00 p.m. and Chairman Ellis will end the Commission meeting early enough to allow travel time to the Capitol Complex. The Commission agreed.

The ADVS Director, Pat Chorpenning, provided a briefing on the Veterans Task Force. The first two meetings were held on September 9, 2005 and October 5, 2005 at the Governor's Conference Room on the 2nd floor of the Executive Towers. One of the most effective presentations dealt with how the number of Veterans Benefits Counselors in the state compares to the number of veterans. The most important work product from the Task Force will be its recommendations, which will be presented at the 12/15/05 meeting. These recommendations may include the following:

- Request for \$10 million to build a home in Tucson
- Legislative support and funding to support construction of a cemetery in northern Arizona
- Request for additional Veterans Benefits Counselors
- Providing benefits offered by other states that will benefit Arizona veterans
- Tax relief for disabled veterans

The November 30 meeting will be an open forum for discussion of recommendation. The December 15 meeting will be discussion of the final recommendations coming out of the Veterans Task Force. The Task Force is proving to be a successful way of building consensus outside the veteran community.

Native American Veterans

Navajo Nation

Director Chorpenning recapped a meeting with Rep. Albert Tom from that morning:

- National Guard and Reservists returning from active duty need counseling, which is difficult on the reservation
- Veterans cemetery on the Navajo Reservation is being requested
- Navajo would benefit by having a VA Clinic on the reservation
- Native American veterans need to be represented on the Veterans Task Force
- Director Chorpenning was invited to three tribal veteran summits. He said that he would only be able to attend events where all tribes are represented (Rep. Tom anticipated these meetings will be scheduled early summer of 2006)

Director Chorpenning will schedule a meeting next week so that Rep. Tom and Commissioner Quochytewa can discuss Native American veteran issues. Director Chorpenning recognizes that Native Americans have a very proud warrior heritage and are more likely to enlist in the Armed Forces than other ethnic groups. Commissioner Quochytewa also offered his support as Director Chorpenning prepares for the Veterans Task Force meeting on November 2, 2005.

Arizona Inter-Tribal Veteran Council

There may be an opportunity to approach gaming tribes to sponsor a Veterans Benefits Counselor (VBC) for their specific area (approximately \$45,000 to \$50,000 a year). It may behoove the Advisory Commissioners to spend some time learning various aspects of tribal cultures and identify special needs of Native American veterans.

Commissioner Quochytewa offered to bring in representatives who would be in an excellent position to educate the Advisory Commission about Native American culture. Different tribes have traditions that may impose a hardship on a Native American veteran applying for VA benefits.

Commissioner Quochytewa attended the Inter-Tribal summit in August and is still trying to make contacts with the gaming casinos for funds to renovate the Indian School building to be used as the Veterans Museum. He suggests the Commission send a letter to the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona supporting the veterans museum and will write it with Gabe Forsberg.

Region 3 Report

Commissioners Dingwall and Piotrowski were asked to schedule their regional meeting in February 2006, to allow the Commission an opportunity to review the Veterans Task Force recommendations scheduled to be published in January 2006. The meeting will be held on Saturday, February 11. Commissioner Piotrowski told the Commander to expect a call from Gabe Forsberg. She estimates 35 to 50 attendees for the Region 3 meeting.

Commissioner Ellis reminded the Advisory Commissioners to make contacts for their region. Support staff will email invitations to contacts who have expressed an interest in veteran issues. Commissioner Boyd will provide contact names for AMVETS and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Commissioner Ellis also wanted to send invitations to the Arizona tribes in addition to the routine invitees of the regional meetings.

The San Carlos Indian Reservation is very close to Safford and Commissioner Quochytewa offered to set up a meeting for the Commissioners with tribal representatives the day before the Advisory Commission meeting. Commissioner Quochytewa was asked to develop a list of topics to be discussed at that meeting. He will also contact Apache Gold Casino about hosting that meeting.

OEF/OIF (Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom) Steering Committee

Chairman Ellis passed out minutes of the 8/10/05 meeting of the OEF/OIF Steering Committee. He was very concerned that the State Adjutant may not be able to speak to issues faced by the Reserves returning from active duty. Returning National Guard personnel are given the option of getting a physical exam at the time they return (which will extend their time away from their families), while the Reservists are required to have a physical.

Recruitment of National Guard and Reserves will become more difficult if benefits are not extended to those being deployed to OEF/OIF. The issues discussed are federal and not state, but need to be included in the VTF recommendations.

Commissioner Ellis mentioned that equipment for the Guard and Reserves was not adequate. Units are being deployed with the equipment that had been handed down from the active forces.

Open Discussion / For the Good of the Order

Bob Stump Arizona Veterans Museum

Two guests presented information: Lynn Timmons, Federal Relations and Grants Liaison with the City of Phoenix and Sarah Hall, Central City Administrator with City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation. They passed out a letter dated 6/9/05 requesting \$2 million in Economic Development Initiative. A similar request had been sent out last year and they obtained \$150,000 to help fund the project. Congressmen Pastor and Kolbe were supportive of the request, but sit on the committees receiving the request and were unable to sign the letter of support.

Ms. Timmons strongly encouraged the Advisory Commissioners to contact their Congressional delegates and refer to the specific request outlined in the June 9 letter. Commissioner Dingwall asked if email was a sufficient contact and Ms. Timmons indicated that a personal card and telephone calls were the most effective.

Commissioner Ellis asked for a status report on the City of Phoenix/ADVS application for 12% revenue sharing. The Ak-Chin Tribe has acknowledged receipt of the application. Gila River is reviewing the request at this time and will inform the City of their decision in October. This is a 22 year funding stream, so Ms. Timmons is not discouraged. It is most important to make personal contacts with any of the tribes. The tribes are given 25 days after the close of their fiscal year to make distributions to grant applicants. Ms. Timmons was unclear as to how the State might be able to distribute them. Director Chorpensing offered to research that process and get back to her.

The first occupant of the veterans museum will be the Arizona Hall of Fame. There are a number of American Indian recipients of this award, dating back to pre-statehood days. Ms. Timmons mentioned there has been community interest in making donations to renovate the building.

An architectural firm has been selected to work with the project. The first priorities are safety and structural renovations. HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) will be a challenge, since equipment cannot be placed on the roof of an historical building. She offered to give regular updates on how the renovation project is proceeding and suggested that the Advisory Commission hold a meeting at the site for a first-hand look.

The grammar school building is earmarked for the museum; it is located just to the west of Memorial Hall (the largest building on the property). The grammar school will also serve as the information center housed in that facility and the park office will be housed there.

Director Chorpensing applauded Lynn Timmons and Sarah Hall for their efforts. He has tentative plans to visit Congressman Renzi in Washington in support of this project.

Sarah Hall did not believe that any renovation had been done to the building, but will call regarding the status of asbestos abatement there.

Director Chorpensing offered to assist in funding a rendering of what the building will look like after it has been completed. Potential donors may need to see a conceptual layout of the interior design. Sarah Hall will speak to the architect on contract to see if a simple rendering may be possible. She can get a cost estimate. Joan Sisco, CEO for Veterans First, Ltd., suggested that the architect may be willing to donate his services or a portion thereof. Ms. Sisco was willing to meet with Jeff Swan (Swan and Associates) if this would be helpful.

Joan Sisco was willing to establish a separate fund for museum renovation, using its 501(c)(3) status. There was a motion to have Veterans First, Ltd. establish a donation fund that could be used to support the establishment of a veterans museum. The motion carried unanimously.

Medal of Honor

Chairman Ellis applauded the efforts of Joan Sisco, Veterans First, Ltd., and Director Chorpensing. The annual Congressional Medal of Honor Convention was held in Phoenix. Director Chorpensing reviewed the events during the convention, many of which are open only to the recipients and their spouses. Several Advisory Commissioners attended the Medal of Honor Picnic and the luncheon held at the Arizona State Veteran Home. They expressed their appreciation for being allowed to participate.

Robert Sigholtz Memorial

Patrick F. Chorpenning suggested that the A107 conference room be named the Robert Sigholtz Conference Room, in honor of the Advisory Commissioner who recently passed away. The Advisory Commission was very grateful to the Director for his proposal and a motion to that affect unanimously carried.

Additional Assistance offered by Veterans First, Ltd.

Joan Sisco, Veterans First, Ltd. will pursue funding from gaming tribes to fund counselors that process VA claims in addition to dealing with counseling in keeping with Native American tradition. She is also pursuing donated vehicles that may be obtained from the Arizona Department of Administration – Surplus Property. She is working to get vehicles to support transportation needs of rural veterans requiring health care. Ms. Sisco will report the status of the project to the Advisory Commission.

Adjournment – Meeting adjourned at 1:15 p.m. by acclamation. Next meeting will be held on Thursday, November 10, 2005 at the Arizona Veteran Home in Phoenix.